BLACK BREAD

POEMS BY Patience Ross

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TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETRY

Edited by John Drinkwater, Henry Seidel Canby, and William Rose Benét

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BLACK BREAD

POEMS BY

PATIENCE ROSS

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BLACK BREAD

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POEMS BY PATIENCE ROSS

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FOR JOHN IRELAND

CONTENTS

	Page
Black Bread	9
I am naked now	10
The fruit of the Fools' Paradise	11
Mon Frère, Mon Semblable	12
I love him and he loves me not again	13
You have ploughed the field to furrows	14
When you would have me woman, yielding	15
Sour Grapes	16
I gave you my good gift	17
Burnt Child	18
Standing Dish	19
Je m'en Fous	20
If I am constant, it is not to you	21
I will be marble with a chiselled smile	22
These are my friends that have destroyed me	23
The youth of the world beating its wings	24
In every beauty the sharp, dark point of pain	25
The city is beleaguered from within	26
The songs I sing	27
You are the poem I cannot write	28
He'll know your lips as I have known them	29
To the Unknown Lover	30
The Double Consciousness	31
I would have you by the sea	32
Remembering lilac and the jonquil heads	33
To-night I shall sleep quietly	34
Ask no betrayal	35
Full-circle back from war to peace	36

The Englishman Who Cannot Go Back 37
The hour before the morning 38
Red apple hang over the running water 39
Still I would keep you, with a Prayer for Rain 40
The parted grasses, the printed ground 41
O small philosopher, your throat unwounded 42
I gave you Spring; I will not give you Summer 43
Now 44
Scatter your rose. I'll not return 45
The night with stars enchanted 46
30.9.26 47
You said you'd come at three o'clock 48
Blaise: Two Poems 49
The seaward window still hangs wide 50
Undine 51
The hour between night and day 52
I who am calling shall never hear the call 53
This is for memory, that I have known them 54
Oh, I'll bestride the nightmare 55

BLACK BREAD

THE Almighty Baker said:
"For you, my child, black bread."
And shall I, as I might,
Cast this black bread away
For half a loaf of white—
(Half a loaf in the night
And a farthing bun by day)—?
Oh shall I—and I might—
Cast this black bread away?

I A M naked now. But strip me of flesh and skin
If you would hold the skeleton within,
If you would couple with my bones, Lover.
But still the secret is not to discover.
No uttermost riving is there that shall prove
The force by which worms and the planets move.
Each of us islanded in the separate mind
Huddles eternally deaf and dumb and blind.
So let us strain together and quench the fire.
Let us brim and drain the cup of our desire,
Until with the height of the highest moment gone
Sleep grants our urgency oblivion.

THE fruit of the Fools' Paradise
Is plucked and eaten at a price.
How long ago was it that we
Reached up to bend the burdened tree?
The hours are months, the days are years,
The price—the laughter hiding tears,
Laughter of lips but not of eyes,
For we have eaten and grown wise,
Wiser than those uncomplex two
Whose apple-tree in Eden grew.
No flaming sword in angel hand
Drives us from our Unpromised Land.
A devil with a cardboard spear
Bids us dwell for ever here,
Mocks and gambols and grimaces
Before our high, unholy places.
And now all paths we may pursue,
Unchecked to think or speak or do,
Doomed to our bliss in the immense
Vacuum of God's indifference.

MON FRÈRE, MON SEMBLABLE

TRUTH were betrayal of the virtue in us.
There is one loyalty. And we must keep it
Tarnished; hide the dark shining from the world.
We must enact all violations.
We must walk aimless and retrace our footsteps,
Whisper of holiness to be overheard.
We must utter a lying revelation
And sob to quiet in false penitence.
We rush upon swords; we are athirst for burning.
We mutilate ourselves and every creature.
Our loves and every loveliness we offer
By seeming to prefer and cherish them.
They are the sacrifice pledged to the shrine
Whose trampled altars are our worship.

Not beauty of any kind. Only a pulse,
A pulse of darkness beating in emptiness,
Beating and shining and denied by us
Who have its urgent beating in our blood.

I LOVE him and he loves me not again.
His heart's a traveller,
Or else a prisoner,
Unfree in space, unfettered by the chain.

Oh, he inhabits solitude. And I
Beat on the void.
His heart's employed
In desert acres, under alien sky.

I cannot heal or minister to his pain.
I am strange to his need.
My heart is bond and freed.
I love him and he loves me not again.

YOU have ploughed the field to furrows.
You have not sown. And now
You are amazed no harvest
Follows upon the plough.

You have seen the sun's high bounty
And heard the falling rain.
You rebuke the barren acre
That never held the grain.

Oh, ruthless in your labour,
Relentless in your will,
You were a bonny ploughboy,
And I—am ploughland still.

WHEN you would have me woman, yielding,
To *your* grief, *your* smart,
Then I'll turn to a fiend and mock you,
Rending your heart.

When you would have me the careless comrade,
So frank, so free,
Then I'll turn to a coiling siren
In a dead sea.
Oh, whatever you would have me,
That I'll not be.

SOUR GRAPES

BURN your incense at that shrine
Which, thank the Lord, shall not be mine.
Rest assured I set no store
On all you worship and adore,
But unshrined rejoicing go,
And glad to think the thing is so—
Glad and glad and glad again
To lack a single incense grain.

I GAVE you my good gift, but you
Traded it for witches' brew.
And now in penitence and pain
You beg of me my gift again.
Oh, come to me and you will find
I am not unwilling or unkind,
I am not shrewish or forlorn.
My quiet eyes are clear of scorn,
My lips are clean of unbelief,
My hands are ready to your grief,
My heart to lay your head upon—
And only the good gift is gone.

BURNT CHILD

YOU dread the fire, and court the flame—
The entrancing, glancing, dancing shame,
Wild, fleeting worship, torn and flung
By the wind. A searing tongue
That scathes and scars with each returning
And finds you ready for the burning.

You come to me to cool your pain,
Then fare to the fire again.
O child, my little child,
By the burning bush beguiled,
He who burns and runs away
May burn in Hell another day!

STANDING DISH

AM I half an hour late?
She will wait—let her wait.
Roses for the few and fair.
She won't care—doesn't care.
Anything will do for her,
Any sprig of rue for her—
Rue not roses for her wear.

Am I captious and unkind?
She'll not mind—never mind.
Smiles and praises for the rare.
She won't care—doesn't care.
Small content she's had of me.
She will still be glad of me
For the curse I have to spare.

Have I nothing else in view?
She will do—have to do.
No one else to see to-day?
She can stay—let her stay.
When the penny spins again
And the fun begins again—
Time for her to run away!

JE M'EN FOUS

NOW to escape to birds and branches
And white, sweet may,
Flying along the tangled forest
By the secret way,
Where curious and bright enchantments
Hang every hedge,
And the small rain-drops pearl and scatter
The leafy ledge.
Thorn and briar spring from my footsteps.
The willow-switch whips
In the face of all pursuers,
Stinging their lips.
My lips have the kiss of leaves on them.
The cool embrace
Folds me as I run laughing, laughing
To the secret place.

IF I am constant, it is not to you—
Or you—
But to these boughs against the sky of night;
To the leap of a fish; to a bird's flight;
To sun in water and water in sun.
Not to you or to anyone
Am I true.
My fidelity is a thing
Borne into space on fin and wing,
Impersonal loyalty that transcends
All I bestow not on my friends,
On you who say
"For ever and a day"—
Or you.

I WILL be marble, with a chiselled smile
For all the days.
A silent mouth confronting sound, and dumb
Of blame or praise.

No tear can dim a statue's eyes, furrow
A marble cheek.
Eyes level-lidded, unreflecting, blind
To hold or seek.

I will be marble, with smooth, folded hands
At sculptured rest.
And these stone hands shall never, never strain
You to my breast.

THESE are my friends that have destroyed me,
These have broken me to their will.
They have entreated and employed me
Indifferently for good and ill.
Oh, nothing now remains for breaking
And now the long destruction ends.
I shall sleep now secure from waking
And at the last escape my friends.

THE youth of the world beating its wings
Against the dome of glass,
Beating towards the light and the clear air
To which it may not pass.
Wheeling under the windless dome
In agonised, veering flight—
With its own mad wings blotting
The sun from sight.

IN every beauty the sharp, dark point of pain
Gives time to eternity and colour to light.
This morning hour will pass and come again
Out of new night.

Only through pain—through loss and passing and pain—
Can we know beauty at all, and apprehend
Dimly, imperfectly, light without a stain,
Time without end.

THE city is beleaguered from within,
Infested with the hosts and hordes of sin.
The relief is there, outside the city wall,
Sounding deliverance with a bugle call.
Unanswered bugle—echoing bright and brave
To the dark city it comes late to save,
Till the garrison who man the fort to-day
Behold the angel armies march away.

THE songs I sing
You will not heed.
The gifts I bring
Are not your need.
But my gifts—take them,
Receive and break them.
And let your scorn
My songs adorn
For that brief time set in eternity
That you have grudged but given to them and me.

YOU are the poem I cannot write,
Cloud by day and fire by night,
Dusking your beauty for an hour
To unsheathe again the shining flower.
And for me all music is
Hearted in your silences.

HE'LL know your lips as I have known them,
The small, soft line,
Closed, and then parted, fastening and clinging
As once they did to mine.

His hands will move firmly, tenderly,
Seeking and blind,
All that I had of healing and consolation
His hands will find.

You will lie in his arms, enfolded,
Held near and near,
And gladly take from him that worship
I gave you, dear.

TO THE UNKNOWN LOVER

OH, you will have what I have never had.
You will know all that I imagined only.
Where I was sorrowful, you will be glad.
You will lack nothing; you will not lie lonely.

You will hold what I stretched empty hands to,
Kiss a living love and not the air.
You will look upon the shining glory
That was veiled from me and my despair.

Oh, you will have what I have never had,
And hear the music that I might not waken.
Even my dream shall go to make you glad—
From him that hath not, even that is taken.

OH, when I kiss the crucifix
Your mouth's the image in my mind.
But when I thread your hair I find
The rosary with my fingers mix.

With my heart full of sins to come
I say the Memorare over.
But when I'm in your arms, my lover,
My heart cries: Virgo Virginum.

You would not pardon if you knew.
God knows and He will not forgive.
Craven, tormented I must live
A traitor both to God and you.

I WOULD have you by the sea
Bruised and beaten—
Against every rock hurled
Till all rocks in the world
Of your flesh had eaten—
And then given to me
That I might taste
Your body with bleeding laced
(Blood and salt)
And with lips and teeth eagerly
Wound every wound again
To an ecstasy of pain.
(Blood and salt and blood).

REMEMBERING lilac, and the jonquil heads,
The shafted sunlight striking our narrow beds,
Your eyes waking to the spring morning, your eyes
In which I saw my sun, my spring arise—
Remembering all, in these the autumn days,
I hear the echo of that April praise
And see the lilac spray dashed in the rain
And the jonquils bruised to a new beauty of pain
And know you entering my heart again.

TO-NIGHT I shall sleep quietly,
Lonely and comforted.
Only the starbright miracle
Shall burn above my bed.
The tiger quenched shall come not now
To trouble me.
The beating wings shall still for once
Their instancy.
This night I shall sleep quietly,
And find the cool release
Of the night-long reflected star,
Unpassionate, at peace.

ASK no betrayal. For I may not give
The things by which men live.
My pride and not my honour be the price
Yielded in sacrifice.
I will embrace all bitterness but this,
And all indignities
Bowing the heads, breaking the hearts of men.
Ask no betrayal, then.

FULL-CIRCLE back from war to peace,
And found again the blest release.
Now we are quiet in the sun
Of the white day new-begun.
The bird uncaged takes wing to fly.
The small ship sails into the sky.
We breathe the shining, early air.
The changed world stretches bright and bare.
(Was there a voice—a voice that cried
From blackness where a fire had died,
An echo that the dawn-wind bore—
"Full-circle back from peace to war"?)

THE ENGLISHMAN WHO CANNOT GO BACK

UNDER grey skies I was born,
Among small fields hedged with thorn.
There a silver river wound
Through kingcup gold of marshy ground.
The gipsies in the April days
Lit their fires at the crossways.
The cuckoo from the budding tree
Called his heartbreak mockery.
The spired horizon, vague and dim,
Was our life-bowl's constant rim.
Our large adventure was three miles
Of pilgrimage by paths and stiles
Through the snowy orchards down
To the huddled market town.

Oh, here there is unbounded space,
But I come from a little place.
The blue sky arches proudly here,
Never humble-grey and near,
And among strangers set alone
The heart knows exile of its own—
—The heart that at possession's cost
Loves the thing for ever lost.

THE hour before the morning
All streets lead to the sea,
The world is clean and empty,
The waking soul goes free,
Goes winging to the water
And the seawashed sand,
Free of all the sleeping souls
Who'll wake to blot the land.

RED apple hang over the running water,
And blackbird whistle and flute.
My true love harks to the quires of heaven
And eats of paradise fruit.

My true love walks in a clean white garment
Beside the rivers of light,
And worships always and unbeholding
The throne invisibly bright.

Red apple, fall into the running water,
And blackbird, fly to your nest;
My true love's heart is the heart of heaven,
And mine the heart in my breast.

STILL I would keep you, with a Prayer for Rain,
After long rains had drained the heavens dry,
And the bright sun at last shone out again,
Raking us with indifferent golden eye,
And the young world was proud of so much green,
And the river glad of its tumultuous flow—
No rain might fall now where the floods had been—
Still I would keep you—pray you not to go.

THE parted grasses, the printed ground—
These barren tokens my love has found,
The troubled water, the swaying bough,
Are all that mark your passage now.
On my love presses, and still seeks on—
But out of the heart of me you are gone.

O SMALL philosopher, your throat unwounded
By kisses I would have given and still could give—
Small philosopher, patiently expounding
How to exist, but not at all to live——
Up goes the resolute chin. The small mouth tightens,
Telling its tale of dutiful, dull years,
And then, along your cheeks they roll, confounding
Philosophy—those little, hopeless tears.

I GAVE you Spring; I will not give you Summer.
I dance again, but you are not the drummer.
I sing again, but not that Praise of you
I made and sang all March and April through.
For May and June have come, and now July,
And soon the August moon ascends the sky,
Bringing fulfilment—all that you denied
And feared, holding to emptiness and pride,
To delicate withdrawal and soft sighs,
Sweet mouth—and disavowal in the eyes.
You could not give; you would not take from me.
You called me to you undesirously.
You bade me go with invitation.
You were eternally frustration.
The Spring is over; the April rains are dry.
And soon the August moon ascends the sky.

NOW

NOR friend nor lover; each way unfulfilled.
But now the rose is rent, the music stilled.
Withdraw your hands, that would not curse or bless,
Since all their gifts are turned to emptiness.

SCATTER your rose. I'll not return
This road again.
Snuff out your candles. They'll not burn
In wind and rain.
Swing to your window, smoothe your coverlet,
And spill your wine—
And in new eyes look counsels of regret,
But not in mine.

THE night with stars enchanted
Brought bitter gifts to me—
Your scorn and laughter
Of blade-bright mockery.
I watched till morning
Broke bitterly grey—
And heard your laughter
In my heart all day.

(30.9.26.)

YOUR eyes held darkness.
Your mouth smiled bitterly.
But I remembered
The April hawthorn tree
Flowering starrily,
Ivory clear and white
In the drawn dusk
Of the young spring night.
And remembering
I stood again
With hawthorn drifting
Into the empty lane—
Stood waiting—waiting—
And only found
The hawthorn flowering
On enchanted ground.

. . . . .

Your eyes held darkness.
You spoke bitterly—bitterly.
And your heart hid
The flowering hawthorn tree.

1

YOU said you'd come at three o'clock.
You had not come by four—
And I who should have loved you less
Could only love you more,
And stand on tiptoe in my mind
Watching the hours through,
Starting at every voice and step
That none of them was you.

2

Only the hawthorn in the rain,
And the gate swinging—
The path going up from the lane—
Would you ever come again—
("Come again" a bird was singing)—
Come again?

3

Oh, how d'you do—yes, lovely, isn't it?
No—I don't mind a bit—
I understand—*of course*—I understand—
Some other day—next week—next month—next year—
*Good*bye—the crashing world with just your hand
To steady it, my dear.

BLAISE: TWO POEMS

THE star that burns
With the last pallor of reflected light.
The star unquenched
Though it burn underseas.
Fire of the white snake,
Of the snow-leopard,
Of sun on the icefloes,
Of sand, of sand
When the air's sick with heat.
The great brass marigold
In the night.

. . . . .

BLAISE,
I will give you a mirror,
(You're so vain)
And red carnations,
(For pride),
And we'll have all drums and trumpets in the orchestra,
And ivory thrones spread with tigerskins,
And forty thousand lamps,
And a peacock . . .
But it will be quite enough
To give you a mirror.
You'll see everything in it,
(Except Blaise?)

THE seaward window still hangs wide,
And we can hear the summer tide
On the dark beach, and see the light
Flash from the Lizard through the night.
The curtain never stirs at all,
Blue against the whitewashed wall—
Blue and white like summer sky,
And we sit silent, you and I,
Feeling no need of touch or speech
To bring us nearer each to each.
This is the bright dream like a flower
Hearted in the midnight hour—
The candle flame that wind and rain
Can never now put out again.

UNDINE

CLOSE the seaward window—
The rain beats from the West.
The Undine's hands are pressed
Pitifully to the window;
Her face looks from the gloom.
Close and curtain the window;
Light the lamp in the room.

Heartless Undine—
Broken-hearted Undine—
The Undine comes at the last light
When sheeted rain brings on the night.
The spray hurls below
And the waters flow
Bitterly.
The wet rocks gleam a little,
Then, sullenly,
Darkness.

Through the curtain—
Through the rainblind window—
I see her,
The Undine.

THE hour between night and day,
With stars and daylight in the sky,
And the sea-road winding grey,
And the still air dead and dry.

The trees withdraw and stand aloof.
Unstirred is the bracken bed.
No wind wakes in the leafy roof.
The air, the air of dusk hangs dead.

Oh, for thunder and the rain,
Crashing, pouring everywhere!
Oh, to return to life again
From this prison of still air!

I W H O am calling shall never hear the call
That unheard holds me thrall.
I the archer bleed from the arrow unshot
That wounds me not.

THIS is for memory, that I have known them,
The white peaks, crowding into the empty sky.
But I have said farewell to the snow mountains,
And tread the valley road until I die.

OH, I'll bestride the nightmare
And ride the road to Hell,
Bidding to friends and enemies
A casual farewell.

But this is no short journey.
Au revoir masks adieu.
Farewell, to friends and enemies,
And, oh, farewell to you.

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POEMS BY

PATIENCE ROSS

STREETS IN THE MOON

By Archibald MacLeish

'ARCHIBALD MACLEISH is an Elizabethan in his love of fine phrases and in his power to grasp the metaphysical in sensuous terms; and he knows how to build toward a climax, both conceptual and prosodic, in a large and complex fashion of which most of his contemporaries seem to be sentimentally afraid. Certainly Mr. MacLeish need not be afraid, as his Einstein, in the present volume, superbly proves — a long poem which any living poet might envy, as rich in thought as it is in color and movement.' — *Conrad Aiken in The New Republic.*

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